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Charles F. Briggs.

MASTERS OF ART AND LITERATURE.

Tenth Article.

CHARLES F. BRIGGS.

"THERE comes Harry Franco, and as he draws near,
You'll find that's a smile which you took for a
sneer;
One half of him contradicts t'other, his wont
Is to say very sharp things and do very blunt;
His manner's as hard as his feelings are tender,
And a sortie he'll make when he means to sur-
render;
He's in joke half the time when he means to be
sternest,
When he seems to be joking be sure he's in
earnest;
He has common sense in a way that's uncommon.
Hates humbug and cant, loves his friends like a
woman,
Builds his dislike of cards, his friendships of oak,
Loves a prejudice better than aught but a joke,
Is half upright Quaker, half downright come-
outer,
Loves Freedom too well to go stark mad about her,
Quite artless himself is a lover of Art,
Shuts you out of his secrets and into his heart,
And though not a poet, yet all must admire
In his Letters of Pinto his skill on the liar."

—LOWELL'S "Fable for Critics."

SOME twenty years ago the "Adven-
tures of Harry Franco, a Tale of the

Great Panic," was published in two volumes, in New-York. Nobody knew the author, but the book immediately attracted attention, since the subject of it was still very fresh, and it was something new to find a romance of American life, dealing with contemporary events, besides, having for its hero a denizen of our business marts. Soon after the appearance of this work, there appeared, in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, a series of articles by Harry Franco, some of them serious stories, but chiefly humorous sketches of city life and satires of contemporary events. Among them was a story called "Haunted Merchant," which was so popular, that the publisher of the magazine was induced to make a separate monthly serial of it, and after its completion to publish it in a volume. A strict *incognito* cannot long be preserved by an author whose writings excite unusual attention, and challenge popular remark; and, though Harry Franco appeared anxious to keep his personal identity a secret to all, yet it soon became known that his real name was Charles F. Briggs. He

must have been very industrious with his pen about the time of the publication of the "Haunted Merchant," for articles appeared from him in nearly all the leading magazines of the day: the *Knickerbocker*, the *Democratic Review* (then under the editorship of John L. O'Sullivan, now our present *Chargé* at the Court of Portugal), *Boston Miscellany*, *Graham's Magazine*, and the *New World*, then in its prime. Besides his varied and highly popular contributions to those periodicals, he published a small book entitled "Working a Passage; or, Life in a Liner," which had a very large sale. It gave the adventures of a young American, who, having been sent to Europe by his parents, to be free from the perils of the cholera (which had just broken out in New-York), found himself, in consequence of the death of his father, without money, in Paris. Instead of begging or borrowing his way back home, he determined to work his passage, and thus preserve his independence. Hence the title. The exquisite characterization of qualities as well as of idealities, proved the author to be possessed of those intuitions which always mark the true man of genius.

In the year 1845, Mr. Briggs established a weekly newspaper, called "*The Broadway Journal*," in conjunction with the late Edgar A. Poe. This publication soon attained notoriety, though it probably never reached a very large circulation. He wrote a great many articles for the *Journal*, viz.: criticisms, essays, and poems; but, finding Poe an uncomfortable associate, he abandoned the work at the end of six months,* and soon after became associate editor of the *Evening Mirror*, then in its fullest vigor. It was for this paper that he furnished a series of satirical letters under the signature of "Ferdinand Mendez Pinto." Though importuned to consent to their re-publication in a volume, he refused, because some of the persons satirized in these papers good naturedly, under fictitious names, felt aggrieved. The author was not the man to reproduce anything which he had reason to know would hurt the feelings of any one. Profit never has

* Poe, in his mention of this enterprise, would leave the impression that the first idea of such a journal and its first proprietorship were his. The fact is, as above stated, that Mr. Briggs had the chief claim to the *experiment*, for it proved little else:—it failed from too much of Poe.

induced Mr. Briggs to a discourtesy, be it said to his honor.

It was in the *Mirror* that he published "The Trippings of Tom Pepper," a romance similar in character to his first work. It was afterward re-published, in two volumes, and has since been brought out in Bonner's *New-York Ledger*, and, under a different title, in still another popular weekly journal.

While editing the *Mirror*, Mr. Briggs also edited Holden's *Dollar Magazine*, which, under his admirable management, was very successful, attaining to a very large circulation; but, the proprietor of it having been tempted to embark for California, on the first outbreak of the "gold fever," it passed into new hands; Mr. Briggs then abandoned it, and was succeeded in the editorship by Professor Fowler, now of the Rochester University, under whose administration it gradually sickened and died.

Mr. Briggs left the *Mirror*, and edited, for the publisher, George P. Putnam, Esq., "The Homes of American Statesmen," and "The Homes of American Poets," writing the articles on "Franklin," on "Lowell," and on "John P. Kennedy."

In company with George W. Curtis and Parke Godwin, he projected *Putnam's Monthly*, and was the responsible editor of that, in many respects, most admirable magazine, during the first two years of its existence, when it reached its culminating point in reputation and prosperity.*

During the time he was editor of *Putnam's Monthly* we believe he contributed one article to each number; among them the sketch called "Elegant Tom Dillar," which Burton has since comprised in his "Encyclopedia of Humor." Soon after Mr. Raymond, of the *New-York Times*, was elected Lieutenant-Governor of the State, Mr. Briggs engaged upon that paper as associate editor, and has continued this engagement up to the present time, assuming the entire editorial management during the absence of Mr. Raymond. In addition to these daily duties (which, of course, are engrossing and imperative), he has still found time to contribute to several other journals and

magazines, and also to edit one of our most popular weekly papers. Several stories from his pen, during the last two years, show that Harry Franco has infinite resource in fictitious composition. We have, notwithstanding the vast array of popular tale writers, very few who are capable of writing a really first-class story. Mr. Briggs is one of the very best, although he does not seem to covet a reputation in that department of Literature.

Mr. Briggs is the author of several works which have become somewhat notorious as the production of others. Thus, we hear it said on good authority, that various lectures which have been delivered by certain *popular* lecturers, throughout the country, with considerable *eclat*, are from the ready pen of Mr. Briggs. It is also understood that he is the author of a most admirable work on Architecture, in two volumes, which has another name on its title-page. He is also the author of the fine biography of Edgar A. Poe, prefixed to the recent superb English edition of Poe's Poems. Considering how badly Mr. Briggs had been treated by Poe, in his malignant "Literati" notice, as well as in his private slanders; and also how much of Poe's shortcomings Mr. Briggs knew from positive personal evidence, the biography is a model of forbearance and just estimate. Dr. Griswold's "Memoirs," prefixed to the "Literati," cannot lay claim to any forbearance for the weaknesses and sufferings of the dead who committed his literary remains into the Doctor's hands. [How Poe's ghost must have raved over that "discharge of trust" by the Doctor!]

Mr. Briggs is an occasional contributor to the columns of the omnivorous *Ledger*, that great literary maelstrom which draws into its vortex much of the very best literary talent in the country.

As to the personal history of Mr. Briggs, but little has been made known, and we have not been able to gather much that would be specially interesting.

Poe, in his series of sketches of the "Literati of New-York," gives a sketch of him, which is so manifestly the fruit of personal malignity, that no value can be attached to it as a contribution to the biographical literature of the day. A much truer and gentler delineation of character is that given by Lowell, in his "Fables for Critics," which we have given at the commencement of this sketch; and

which may be regarded as a just characterization of personal peculiarities. As a man is known by the company he keeps, it may serve as an indication of Mr. Briggs' personal relations and affinities, that Lowell dedicated to him the second volume of the last edition of his poems. In Griswold's "Prose Writers of America," in Duyckinck's "Dictionary of American Authors," in Appleton's "Encyclopedia," and in Allibone's "Dictionary of English Authors," we find brief though quite unsatisfactory biographies of Mr. Briggs, from which we learn that he is a native of Nantucket, Massachusetts, the State which has furnished so much of the brains of our literature. He has resided in the city of New-York, however, since his boyhood, and therefore has been thoroughly educated in metropolitan life. He may be regarded as a "representative man" of the great corps of literary *workers*, who furnish the country with mental food, yet who think no more of putting themselves forward as objects to be stared at and talked of, than the unknown laborers of our fields and gardens, who supply us with our daily physical provender.

Mr. Briggs is now in the full maturity of his powers, and the public has a right to expect much acceptable labor from his hands. The journalism of this country is vastly changing for the better—a change brought about by the introduction of such men as Mr. Briggs into the newspaper "harness;" and we see no reason why, under the guidance of such men, the American newspaper should not become the best in the world.

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ALBERT F. BELLOW'S.

 OW necessary it is that a child's taste and genius should be watched by the parent, and when their direction is clearly indicated, how necessary, for the after-success of

the man, that every proper means of development should be adopted! In this respect our fathers greatly err, since the actual bent of a child's genius less frequently determines the future profession or calling than some extraneous circumstance of "position," living, family preference, &c., &c. We meet with fine native artists who are poor lawyers or doctors; with poor artists who have

* It began to decline after he left it, and gradually fell into a marasmus. After a variety of changes and a succession of misfortunes, it gave up the ghost in company with *Emerson's Magazine*, with which it had been united.